

Statement of Dawn King  
President, Truck Safety Coalition  
Board Member, Citizens for Reliable and Safe Highways;  
In Opposition to Senate Bill 314  
Senate Transportation Committee  
Michigan Senate  
February 25, 2016

Hello, my name is Dawn King and I am the President of the Truck Safety Coalition (TSC), a nonprofit that is a partnership between the Citizens for Reliable and Safe Highways (CRASH) and Parents Against Tired Truckers (PATT). I became involved in TSC my father, Bill Badger, was killed in 2004 near the Georgia state line by a tired trucker who had fallen asleep at the wheel after driving all night and crashed into his car.

As I became more involved with TSC, I began learning more about truck safety and eventually began educating others about different policies that can improve it. My husband, Bruce, and I continued to educate ourselves and other people, but we wanted to do more. Consequently, we started advocating to lawmakers with other TSC volunteers. Throughout the years we have successfully promoted several truck safety improvements and defended existing truck safety laws and regulations from being rolled back. I hope that Michigan lawmakers will join me and TSC in this opportunity to stand up for safety and protect a law that protects the people by opposing Senate Bill (SB) 314. Thank you for allowing me to provide my written testimony opposing SB 314, legislation that would grant an exemption to seasonal weight restrictions, also known as the "frost law," for trucks carrying maple sap.

Granting yet another exemption to Michigan's "frost law" contradicts the original intent of the law. Seasonal weight limits, which reduce weight limits on maximum axle loads, maximum wheel loads, and gross vehicle weights for commercial motor vehicles driven on state roads during March, April, and May were established to protect our state's infrastructure. Because of the freezing and thawing that occurs during the aforementioned months, the roads become far more susceptible to damage caused by heavy vehicles. Therefore, allowing heavier trucks carrying maple sap during these months will result in more road damage, in turn costing the taxpayers even more.

This bill also ignores Michigan's crumbling infrastructure. The American Society of Engineers found 22 percent of Michigan roads are in poor condition and 28 percent of Michigan bridges are structurally deficient or functionally obsolete. Lawmakers should not be enacting an exemption that weakens a law put in place to protect our infrastructure.

Additionally, one of the arguments for HB 4188 is based on the erroneous claim that heavier trucks will result in fewer trucks. Increasing the truck weight limit will not decrease the number of trips, result in fewer miles traveled, or improve safety by reducing the number of trucks on the highways. Despite several increases in weights of large trucks over the past few decades, the number of trucks and miles traveled on U.S. highways has consistently grown.

The number of fatalities as a result of truck crashes in Michigan has also grown. From 2011 to 2014, total fatalities from all crashes in Michigan increased by just 1.3 percent, while fatalities from truck crashes in our state increased by 61 percent during that same time. Clearly, truck safety in our state, like infrastructure, is worsening. Michigan lawmakers must address this problem, but allowing heavier trucks is not the solution.

Bills, like this one, that increase truck weight limits industry-by-industry are nothing more than a back door strategy by special interests to come back to our state legislature in several years and lobby for heavier truck weights statewide. Also, allowing exempted industries to exceed state truck weight limits compromise safety by eroding uniformity and weakening enforcement efforts.

Over the past ten years truck crashes have claimed the lives of more than 1000 people in Michigan, and over 47,000 nationally. As someone who has experienced the pain of losing a loved one in a truck crash, I urge our senator to oppose SB 314. At a time when truck crash fatalities have continued to rise every year since 2011, and our infrastructure is crumbling, I urge the senate to pass a constructive law that works for the people rather this destructive law that works for special interests.

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